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■ WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urges an end to all violence and restrictions on peaceful religious activity in China's Xinjiang Uighur [Muslim] Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Religious freedom conditions in the XUAR have declined rapidly since the ethnic violence of June 2009. The Chinese government has instituted sweeping security measures that include efforts to weaken religious adherence and stop "illegal religious gatherings." Restrictions on Uighur Muslim religious activities have caused deep resentment with Beijing's oversight of the XUAR.

"Launched in the name of stability and security, Beijing's brutal campaign of repression against Uighur Muslims includes even the targeting of peaceful private gatherings for religious study and devotion," said Dr. Katrina Lantos-Swett, USCIRF Chair. "The government is engaged in egregious abuses of internationally recognized human rights, including the precious right of freedom of religion or belief. Predictably, these abuses have led neither to stability nor security."

In its March 2012 Annual Report, USCIRF outlined the religious freedom abuses that Beijing's policies have caused in the XUAR ([Click here to view 2012 USCIRF Annual Report Chapter on China](#)). Teachers, professors, university students, and other government employees are prohibited from observing Ramadan and engaging in daily religious activities such as reciting prayers, distributing religious materials, and wearing head coverings. Minors under the age of 18 continue to be denied access to some mosques and religious education.

Since USCIRF's March report was issued, Chinese police and security forces have raided "illegal religious schools" in the city of Hotan. Forty-seven Uighur Muslims were arrested and 17 children injured in the raids. In the city of Kashgar, Uighur men were sentenced to between seven to 10 years on charges that included "harboring extremist religious thoughts" and holding "underground religious meetings."

"By fueling anger and resentment, China's indiscriminate repression of Uighur religious, cultural, and political life may trigger precisely the extremism that Beijing is claiming to combat. For the sake of security as well as freedom, China's government should lift its restrictions on all peaceful religious activities, particularly during Ramadan," said Dr. Lantos Swett.

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